

BEARS ROOSEVELT CAN'T TELL

QUEER PETS OF NATIVES OF THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS.

The only bear in Africa protected from time immemorial—Made Nevertheless to Supply Food and Raiment—Killed With Elaborate Apologies.

If Mr. Roosevelt has any ambition to be a hunter he is on his African expedition he will have to make some change in his plans. In the parts of the Dark Continent which he contemplates visiting the bear is altogether unknown. The single representative of the Ursus family found in Africa occurs in the northwest corner of the continent, among the Atlas Mountains.

But wild and undiscovered as the region is and ideal as it must be for a hunt the President's ambition would have to stop short of shooting the bear. Morocco is not by any means such a noble character as to tempt the hunter, and in a catalogue of typical brutes or sedies he would not count. But among the mountain people, known commonly as the Berbers but ethnographically as the Shellus, that dirty yellowish vegetation is an object of superstitious reverence and it is never killed without an apology to the animal for the necessity which led to its death.

In the Shellish language it is addressed as "sir," and nothing more respectful can be imagined than the terms in which the savage of "the China of the West" addresses the dead beast after a change in its dietary from vegetables and honey to a sheep or a child has made it desirable to pronounce its death in the most subject manner the death in deploration, and it is only when the offence is of very serious character that such an execution takes place among the tribesmen. After having committed that which is reckoned as little less than a heinous crime the offender is known for the rest of his life by a name which is singularly opprobrious and means not "the man who killed a bear" but "the wretch who said 'sir' to the dead."

Manifestly the Shellus, with this peculiar respect for the animal among themselves, entertain the most uncompromising resentment against any outsiders who kill bears. Although there is nothing that could go to show that they regard the bear as sacred in any sense as the bull, alligator or snakes have been or are regarded by heathen people, the superstition is incredible.

In former times when Morocco was Mauritania and in the medieval period when the Berbers opposed obstinate resistance to Islam the soldiers of both Belasria and Okba, who ventured to kill bears were marked for assassination. In the tenth century, with the Arab power at its height, oppression, cruelty and oligarchical power were hardly resented until the Fatimides began to destroy the bears, when the powerful Shelli tribe of Ketama arose and overcame the Arabs, putting to an end their empire in North Africa.

Always offence against the bears is deadly. Time and again clashes between the Moorish authorities and the aborigines have started over the wanton destruction of these animals.

In 1852 when the Sultan of Morocco wanted to make Charles II. of England a present he sent two lions and took occasion to ingratiate himself with the hillmen by the ostentatious declaration that while the English monarch might have preferred bears, "as he could eat them," he had considered it best to forebear in favor of the lions. As late as last century in the reign of Abd el Rahman, that chieftain in the midst of his troubles with Spain had only to describe himself to the tribes as "protector of the bears" to have their hearty cooperation.

Obviously to hunt bears in the Atlas is to be thought of as a moment, and while the American hunter may get as broad licenses in other regions as he does to ask for there would be no use in having any intentions against the pot of the Shelli. Pet it is, to be killed, rather than sacred animal.

To say that the Shelli reverence the bear would be incorrect, but there are some who have respect for it above all other animals would not be exaggeration. While not reckoned as a wild beast, still it is not domesticated in the usual sense of the word.

Travellers on the roads in the interior tell of meeting the great creatures or of seeing them asleep in the sun. Unless they are enraged they are not ferocious. Provoked to fury the bear destroys domestic animals, houses, plantations and even the people themselves. Left alone, it eats its fill of honey, fruits and vegetables and enjoys a dolce far niente existence in its native wilds. Every Shelli mother to every son urges kindness to the bear, and at the obsequies of Shelli men the custom is to touch the wall which recites that the deceased was "dutiful to his mother as one who is good to the bears."

Nevertheless, in spite of all this superstition the Shelli make a virtue of bear killing. While the protective injunction is emphatic and while the denunciations against "murderers of bears" never lack strength, there are those who supply the people of the hills with food and raiment. It is not hunted, however, and when the time comes for it to yield its skin, its round steaks and its oil of full size apology for the execution dominates.

Toward the end of winter the Shelli tell the rocks where the animals hibernated and have no difficulty in securing young bears, the cubs of the previous summer. When a cub is brought home the wife of the owner takes it in charge and it is fed on green stuff and fish.

At first it is allowed to roam about the house freely, but as it increases in size it is placed in a cage and surfeited. No Shelli man ever took more delight in fattening his pig than that Shelli woman in stuffing that bear.

In August or September or October it is decided that the prisoner has become dangerous, and that the welfare of the family requires its death. For an entire day it is made to fast, and then a test of its ferocity is made.

A sheep is introduced into the cage, and proof of the ferocious character of the animal is furnished. The sheep is devoured in the presence of the owner and a party of his friends, and the verdict is pronounced that if the bear was loose it would be dangerous to the family.

As it ceases to grow the owner is so pleased that he is allowed to keep the bear as a pet. For this act, which is forced on him by inevitable necessity, he prays for the victim's forgiveness.

The bear, having finished the sheep, gives no indication that it is not of a forgiving nature. The owner, however, remains prostrate, and the women and girls of the household gather about the cage and while waiting for a response to their prayer. There is no doubt permitted as to this pardon, for in a few minutes three young men enter the enclosure and rope the animal, strangling it to death.

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The fisheries of Siberia are very important. The River Amur is especially rich in salmon. The amount of preserved fish exported from Siberia grew from 640 tons in 1899 to 2,000 tons in 1902. The high price of salt and tin plate and the lack of skilled knowledge are retarding the Siberian canned fish industry.

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